

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF INTELLIGENCE

Report of a Seminar on Intelligence
Analysis in the CIA Today

Opinions regarding the present practice of intelligence analysis in this Agency, especially its major strengths, weaknesses, and problems are rich and varied. This was the central impression emerging from an afternoon seminar ranging broadly over the whole of the subject sponsored by the Center for the Study of Intelligence on 15 August.* Although aspects of the process which individual speakers and panelists choose to highlight differed widely according to their personal perspectives and inclinations, there was some contiguity of view. Among the points on which there seemed to be relatively general agreement were the following:

--that the variety of analytical approaches, tools, models and methodologies applicable to intelligence analysis is now very extensive, but that accepted doctrine on how and in what mix they should be applied is much less developed, and perhaps should be given more consideration.

*The speakers and panelists at the seminar represented a rough cross section of experienced, Agency practitioners of the art of analysis. Four of the participants were asked to speak on the subject, five others were asked as panelists to add their comments. The seminar concluded with a discussion session in which the audience of about sixty Agency officers was invited to join.

Comments on this report of the seminar, as well as suggestions for future discussion groups on particular aspects of the intelligence analysis process are solicited and can be directed to:

Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1036
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--that the presentational aspects of the intelligence analysis process are of key importance and perhaps do not receive sufficient attention.

They need consistent effort at improvement.

--that the "management of analysis" is also a key element of the intelligence analysis process and needs additional consideration and effort at improvement.

--that the practitioners disagree over the value of long-range, broad gauge analytic research as opposed to the concentration of Agency resources on "firefighting"-type analysis of current, key problems.

--that some analytic practitioners believe intelligence analysis has been the stepchild over the years in the Agency budget, but that this is changing.

A distillation of some of the key points made by the participants and by the audience follows below:

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Speakers

The initial speaker was [REDACTED] a former member of the Board of National Estimates, now retired and a frequent consultant to the Agency. [REDACTED] believes that the Agency

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25X1A would profit by a greater effort to develop some additional doctrinal or methodological underpinning for intelligence analysis. He noted that political analysis in the Agency often utilizes a variety of different analytical approaches or models ranging from the explanation of developments mainly in terms of historical influences thru the so-called "rational actor" model, to currently fashionable approaches based on such factors as the assessment of bureaucratic influences within a given government, on psychiatric studies of the leaders, and on the cultural dynamics of a given country. All of these models, of course, have relevance in particular cases, but the implication of [REDACTED] remarks was that we have not given enough studied, doctrinal consideration to the mix of models or methodologies with which we approach political analysis in the CIA, or to the need for a proper integration of multi-disciplinary approaches.

25X1A [REDACTED] also emphasized the importance of studying and improving techniques for the presentation of analysis, if we are to significantly improve the art of intelligence analysis itself. In his view, intelligence analysis consists of an integrated, several part function involving determination of the facts, gaining perspective on the relationships between facts, and presenting the results in a meaningful analytical

framework with consideration for the mode in which the analytical results are communicated.

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[REDACTED] was followed by [REDACTED] who is currently Chief of the International/Functional Staff in the Office of Political Research. Jack spoke of the activities of his staff which focus on the transnational and global problems that increasingly demand the attention of US policy makers, such as food and terrorism. This staff seeks to expose and illuminate some of the causal relationships involved in these issues, often using a multi-disciplinary approach and a conscious choice of analytical methodologies, including some work on theory and model-building. Jack noted that the studies produced by his staff by necessity often have a very broad framework and are based on a set of admittedly speculative assumptions, in contrast to the necessarily careful effort to reach factually correct assumptions on which to base analysis that is found in most other Agency analytical shops. The intent is to enable CIA consumers to better anticipate some of the new international issues that may emerge in the coming years as well as better understand the relationships that currently exist between problems and issues now at hand. There are difficulties, according to Jack, in developing such studies.

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Often the analysts have no initial expertise on the subject and must acquire this in the course of their research effort. As in most areas of intelligence analysis, there is also inadequate feedback from the consumers. Nevertheless, Jack predicts consumers in the future will request more multidisciplinary, broad gauge study and analysis of the type practiced by his group.

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[REDACTED] presently head of the Strategic Evaluation Center in OSR, also discussed the essential elements of the analytic process in the Agency in his remarks to the seminar. One of the most critical steps in this process, according to Fritz, is that of properly defining the intelligence problem for analysis: not only selecting it, but emphasizing that portion of the issue that will profitably yield to analysis. It is also important, where possible, to give conscious consideration to the nature of the analytical approaches or models being used and to their applicability to the subject at hand. Like [REDACTED] Fritz also stressed the importance of the presentational phase of analysis, particularly a credible and intelligible presentation of conclusions. To do all this requires much more than mechanical application of the scientific method. It requires human and psychological qualities of curiosity and imagination in respect to what is intangible and unknown.

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Among other analytic problems discussed by Fritz was the well-known difficulty of successfully predicting future trends. This process is often undertaken by Agency analysts primarily by extrapolation from present trends. The trouble with extrapolation is not that it is mostly wrong, but that it is mostly right. Analysts tend to become its prisoner and this leads occasionally to some gross and very damaging misjudgments. Any really expert analysis must devote a disproportionately large amount of attention to the prospect for change and to the offbeat theory, so as to maximize the ability to capture discontinuity and change.

Fritz offered an interesting framework for thinking about intelligence analysis that depicts it in terms of SECRETS (some human entity knows the answer) and MYSTERIES (no one really knows the answer, because there isn't one). What the Soviet Union spends on defense looks like a secret, but may be a mystery, even to Brezhnev. Analysts, when dealing with collectors, should do more to break up mysteries into their secret components. Secrets have more or less right or wrong answers to them. In dealing with mysteries, i.e., "What is the future of Portugal?," the analytic process should be designed from the start mainly to get an illuminating or educational range of possible answers, but not to seek a categoric determination.

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25X1A Fritz noted that the role of the analyst has other important aspects apart from the analytic process itself, such as: living with the bureaucracy, consultation with fellow professionals, and repetitive presentations of analysis in the form of briefings, NSSM inputs and the like. In part, it is the burden imposed by other duties such as these that set up a key problem facing analytic staffs today in the Agency: that of providing a suitable environment for analysts, including sufficient working time apart from the meeting and consultation circuit for the conduct of real analysis. 25X1A

25X1A [REDACTED] a senior research analyst with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] also spoke to the seminar.

Clint sees the main role of intelligence analysis as being the reduction of uncertainty, and not necessarily the finding of right answers. Clint is experienced in the development of new analytical methodologies and approaches, especially in the Department of Defense. In working with analysts and in noting how they process their information, Clint has gained the impression that most are very conservative in their approach. They usually fail to extract as much diagnostic certainty as could be extracted. Clint believes that getting people to extract more certainty from their source materials would have a payoff in terms of improved analysis.

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He sees assistance in this area coming from acceptance of some of the newer analytic tools (of which Bayesian analysis is an example) that can lead in some instances to more systematic and complete processing and evaluation of source materials. Clint is also of the opinion that intelligence analysis would be improved if the analyst would make a greater effort to assess and express the probabilities he attaches to his analysis. This, he believes, would go a long way in treating the difficulty of differing consumer interpretation of written analytical products.

Panel Comments

The seminar panel was composed of five experienced practitioners of the analytical art: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In the course of comments by the panel, it became apparent that there was a difference in view over the value of the broad gauge, speculative research of the type now being done by [REDACTED] group. Some panel members felt that the Agency should be concentrating on issues of more immediate, direct relevance to the consumer, so called "firefighting" as one panelist put it. The majority of the panelists believed, however, that the Agency has been short-sighted in the past in failing to give sufficient

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attention to long-range, speculative research and to interdisciplinary efforts in analytic production. One panelist concluded that the main utility of such research is its assistance in helping the consumers understand what questions they should be asking the intelligence community. Several of the participants, including [REDACTED] stressed the need for doing the best possible job both on "firefighting" and on longer-range, more diffuse subjects.

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Another theme that emerged from the comments of the panelists and seemed to find general acceptance was the need to emphasize the role of the analyst himself in the development of the analytical product. It was suggested that more attention needed to be given to proper guidance for the analyst, both in terms of defining the issues and problems for analysis and in allowing the analyst proper leeway in attempting to sell his views. Several of the participants mentioned the importance of studying and improving the process of the "management of analysis" as distinct from the administration of analysts.

The Discussion Period

A variety of additional aspects of the analytic process in the Agency came up during the discussion period. Receiving generally negative treatment were the Key Intelligence Questions

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(KIQs) and their role in helping to improve the analytic product. The general consensus was that this system was too cumbersome, static, and time-consuming to be of much help. This is not to say that monitoring systems are not useful, but the operation of a large, formally organized monitoring system such as the KIQs appears to the majority to take up more time than it is worth. * The theme that a disproportionate amount of the Agency's time and money has been placed on the collection side of our activities as opposed to the analytic function also found general acceptance. It was noted, however, that an increasing amount of resources was being put on the analytic side and that this trend will probably accelerate. It should also be noted that this panel was principally composed of analytic practitioners, rather than collectors.